



# Where There Is Water, There Is Life!

**Catherine Devitt** of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice highlights one of the principal concerns of Pope Francis – the environment. She alerts us to a chronic lack of availability of clean, life-giving water in many parts of the world.

Where there is water, there is life. Indeed, if we look historically, many of the world's earliest settlements appeared in regions influenced by the presence of rivers. Here in Ireland, water systems form an important part of our physical and human geography, past and present. Without clean water, we cannot exist. It is the essential element for all life. And yet, is access to safe, drinkable water something we take for granted when we turn on the

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tap in this part of the world?

All people have a basic and universal right to safe drinkable water, and access to clean, safe water is critical for the future of global population health and the health of our common home. When water is mistreated, neglected, polluted or commodified, this fundamental right is undermined and denied, eroding the foundations for the basis of other human rights.

Ensuring access to water and sanita-

tion for all is Goal 6 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Here in Ireland, what may appear as an abundance of water, may lead to a lack of awareness of the experiences of our brothers and sisters in regions where water is scarce. Not all water gives life. The reality is that millions of people across some of the world's poorest regions lack access to a sustainable supply of fresh, clean water, and millions of lives are lost every year from diseases attributed to unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation.

According to the World Health Organisation, some three in ten people worldwide lack access to safe water at home, and six in ten lack safely-managed sanitation. At the same time, a growing percentage of the global population are at risk of flooding, exacerbated by climate change and poor land management. People in developing countries suffer the most. Inadequate water supply and management around the world lead to famines, food insecurity, ecological decline, and resource-based conflicts. Here in Ireland, the latest



report from the Environmental Protection Agency informs us that a substantial number of our rivers, lakes and estuaries are not as healthy as they should be, and over recent years, there has been a decline in pristine river sites. Growing demand on resources, the increasing trend towards the commodification of water, and the impacts of climate change will amplify these issues, raising important questions about access, social justice, and equity for current and future generations.

Pope Francis makes it clear in *Laudato Si* that care of the world's water sources must be a global priority. The right to water is imbued with a duty to ensure its protection, and the protection of our water systems must be at the core of our public policy objectives. Indeed, these policies should be an expression of inter-generational

solidarity, linking water with other interconnected social, environmental, and economical areas for the sake of a truly integral and sustainable development.

The management of water should not be a concern for policy makers only, however. All of us across civic society have a responsibility. Protection of our water supply demands an urgent realisation of the need and value of water as the essential element of life, and of the importance of moderation in consumption. This requires looking beyond when we turn on and off the tap to give consideration to the use of water in other aspects of our lives. Water is too often the object of waste and neglect, speculation and conflict. We pray for a world where water is respected as a universal, common good, central to the integral development of all life on earth. ♡